

OPINION
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Stokely's 'struggle' goes on

Claude Lewis

He sat in a straight-back chair in the basement of the Church of the Advocate at 18th and Diamond sts. in North Philadelphia and it was like a scene from the distant past.

Now he was serene, playing less to TV and the press than in the old days of his strident youth; days when he set this nation's passions afire with his cries of "black power," "armed struggle," and "total revolution."

Tall and straight, like a richly-colored cigar, Stokely Carmichael, at 36, hardly seemed like the same man who electrified America by challenging racial bias in the South and exporting his anger to the North and eventually around the world.

He is a long way from the days in the South when he headed the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and helped found the original Black Panther Party.

"Those days were very important in our development," he said yesterday. "Those were very important days. We were finding ourselves, making new discoveries each day, learning and growing, and trying to understand what this nation was all about."

Today, he seems more dedicated than ever to his plan for "objective socialism."

"I've changed with time," he said, almost inaudibly, while holding a beautiful child, four-year-old Athena Watson, in his arms.

"Is that your child?" a reporter asked. "Yes," but he made her, the revolutionary said, pointing with philosophical calm to a handsome young man to his right.

For Carmichael, all blacks are related. "What we seek is the recognition of that concept among all black peoples of the world. What we want to achieve is world-wide unification."

When he uses the word "we," he is speaking as a leader in the All-African Peoples' Revolutionary Party, which is steeped in "Pan-Africanism." He spoke in little phrases, almost as though he was testing his words to see how they'd sell.

"You've been less active, and now you seem almost like an anachronism," a reporter challenged.

"No, no," he corrected. "Not less active. More active. But doing different work; keeping a low profile. That's something we learned. If you don't have a force, you'll get blown away. If the '60s taught us anything, it taught us that."

The conversation got around to Dr.



Carmichael and Athena Watson

Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and other leaders in the '60s, including U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young.

"They killed Dr. King because he was a man who believed in justice. He was a man who had a conscience. He was a man who understood how unjust the war in Vietnam was and he had to speak against it."

"If James Earl Ray did kill King, he didn't know what he was doing. He was taught to hate King. But Ray didn't stand for anything. He had no convictions of his own. He was used by those who realized that King was a danger. He (Ray) may have thought he hated King, but it was others who hated him. It was J. Edgar Hoover who killed King. King mobilized millions. Hoover didn't have the tactics to deal with King. He was used to dealing with the white left of the (Sen. Joseph) McCarthy era. So Hoover had to kill King."

"Well, don't you fear the gun yourself?" Carmichael was asked.

"I think America has reached a point of diminishing returns in killing leaders. It helps us, it helps the party. I think it's the parties we're interested

in. You can kill a leader, but the parties, they continue."

Carmichael was asked if he had contact with his pals from SNCC back in the old days. "I bump into them," he said. "Some of them are still in the struggle. I see them all the time. Others have gone on to elective office, others to poverty programs and one of them is U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. He represents white nationalist interests. I represent the interests of black nationalists," said the Washington-based Carmichael.

"Our major preoccupation is with building the party. Victory is inevitable. That's the only thing we're certain of. We say that because what we seek is just. Injustice always fails. . . . My religion is the revolution. My faith is in the masses. Through constant propaganda, through seminars, through proper ideologies, we will be victorious. That is the only thing that is certain. We will succeed," he said intensely.

"What do you do to relax?" he was asked.

"I struggle," he said with an inscrutable smile.